

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00
EB-08 HA-05 AGRE-00 /092 W
-----013463 220726Z /11

O 211559Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8054
INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
AMCONSUL IBADAN IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL KADUNA IMMEDIATE
USICA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 5066

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

REF: LAGOS 4430

1. SUMMARY: EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS INDICATE
THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME DETERIORATION IN THE INTERNAL
SECURITY SITUATION IN NIGERIA. THE NEW LAND DECREE,
THE TIGHTER BUDGET AND ASSOCIATED ECONOMIC CHANGES,
THE CONTROVERSY IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY,
AND STUDENT DISORDERS HAVE AFFECTED ALL ELEMENTS
OF NIGERIA SOCIETY. THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT
IS BLAMED IN VARYING DEGREES FOR ITS INITIATION
OF SOME PROBLEMS AND ITS FAILURE TO DEAL SUCCESSFULLY
WITH OTHERS. GIVEN THE REPORTS AND RUNORS OF COUP

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PLOTTING EARLIER THIS YEAR, SOME WITHIN THE
MILITARY ARE UNDOUBTEDLY ENCOURAGED FOR THEIR OWN
REASONS TO CONSIDER STEPPING IN TO 'SAVE THE
NATION' IN ITS HOUR OF CRISIS. IN THE LONG TERM
PERSPECTIVE, AS NIGERIA APPROACHES CIVILIAN RULE
VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY ARE TESTING THE ABILITY
OF THE GOVERNMENT TO CONTROL THE SITUATION AND

ATTEMPTING TO CARVE OUT A GREATER ROLE FOR THEMSELVES
IN THE FUTURE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. WHILE WE DO
NOT BELIEVE THAT A COUP ATTEMPT OR A POSTPONEMENT OF THE RETURN
TO CIVILIAN RULE IS LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE POSSIBILITY
OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAS CLEARLY INCREASED IN RECENT WEEKS.
END SUMMARY.

2. EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS SINCE TRANS-
MISSION OF REFTEL INDICATE THERE HAS BEEN SOME
DETERIORATION IN THE INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION
IN NIGERIA. STARTING WITH THE MARCH 29 ANNOUNCEMENT
OF THE NEW LAND DECREE THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS
OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY HAVE BEEN SUCCESSIVELY AND
SIGNIFICANTLY IRRITATED BY PARIOUS ACTIONS FOR
WHICH THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT (FMG)
RECEIVES AT LEAST SOME OF THE BLAME.

-- THE SOUTH, PRINCIPALLY THE YORUBA STATES,
WAS UNHAPPY WITH THE LAND DECREE. IT THREATENS
THE POWER AND/OR WEALTH OF THE TRADITIONAL RULERS
AND THE EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS MOST DIRECTLY.

-- THE NEW BUDGET ANNOUNCED MARCH 31 INCLUDED
VARIOUS BELT TIGHTENING MEASURES AND CHANGES IN
RULES WHICH ARE RESULTING IN INCREASED PRICES
FOR A NUMBER OF EVERYDAY COMMODITIES WHICH
AFFECT EVERYONE. SOME COMMODITIES SUCH AS BEER
AND SOFT DRINKS HAVE TEMPORARILY DISAPPEARED FROM
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THE MARKET IN CERTAIN AREAS AND PRICES HAVE SKY-ROCKETED IN
OTHERS.

-- THE SHARIA CONFRONTATION IN THE CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY (CA) AFFECTED THE NORTH, WITH STRONGEST
REACTION IN THE FAR NORTHERN TIER. SOME SUPPORT
HAS BEEN GENERATED FOR THE NORTHERN POSITION AMONG
A FEW SOUTHERN MUSLIMS.

-- THE INCREASE IN UNIVERSITY AND SECONDARY
SCHOOL FEES AFFECTED ALL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. DUE TO
AGITATION BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS
(NUNS) MANY STUDENTS BOYCOTTED CLASSES AND POLICE/
STUDENT CONFRONTATIONS DEVELOPED IN SEVERAL LOCATIONS
RESULTING IN DEATHS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS AND AHMADU BELLO
UNIVERSITY IN ZARIA.

-- POLICE OVERREACTION TO STUDENT PROTESTS HAS EARNED
THE STUDENTS SYMPATHY FROM MANY SOURCES.

3. THE FMG HAS HANDLED ITSELF REASONABLY WELL IN THIS SITUATION.

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-- A CONCERTED EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO
GENERATE SUPPORT FOR THE LAND DECREE, ESPECIALLY
AMONG TRADITIONAL LEADERS, HAS RESULTED IN PUBLIC
STATEMENTS OF ACCEPTANCE BY MANY, INCLUDING TRADITIONAL
LEADERS. DESPITE THESE PUBLIC STATEMENTS, CONVERSATIONS
WITH VARIOUS SOURCES, INCLUDING SOUTHERN MEMBERS
OF THE CA, SUGGEST THAT THESE STATEMENTS WERE SIMPLY LIP
SERVICE IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT PRESSURE. IN THE WORDS
OF ONE MEMBER OF THE CA, 'WE HAVE ACCEPTED A PIECE OF
PAPER; WAIT UNTIL THEY TRY TO ENFORCE IT.'

-- THE FMG HAS DONE A LITTLE TO AMELIORATE THE
CONCERN OVER THE BUDGET AND ASSOCIATED ECONOMIC
SHIFTS. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACTION TO DATE WAS
AN APRIL 20 ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL
SUPPLY COMPANY, WHICH IMPORTS FOOD, THAT IT WILL CEASE
TO SELL TO PRIVATE DISTRIBUTORS 'TO ENSURE THAT
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THESE COMMODITIES PERMEATE TO THE MASSES AS FAR
AS POSSIBLE.' THE PRICE CONTROL BOARD ALSO ANNOUNCED

APRIL 20 THAT COMMODITIES WHOSE PRICES WERE RECENTLY DECONTROLLED (TEXTILES, BEER, SOFT DRINK, TIRES, CANNED MEAT, ETC.) WOULD HAVE MAXIMUM PRICES SET IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION.

-- AFTER WAITING UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR THE CA TO SOLVE THE SHARIA CONTROVERSY WHICH RESULTED IN THE WALKOUT OF APPROXIMATELY ONE-THIRD OF ITS MEMBERS (ALMOST ALL FROM THE NORTH), OBASANJO STEPPED IN APRIL 19 AS THE ISSUE REACHED CRISIS PROPORTIONS AND APPEALED TO THE MEMBERS TO RESOLVE THEIR DISPUTE. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION WAS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE PRIVATE APPEAL OF INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE YUSUF, WHO TOLD MEMBERS THAT THEIR ACTIONS WERE THREATENING 'PEACE AND ORDER' IN NIGERIA. OBASANJO'S APPEAL APPEARS TO HAVE RESULTED IN A COMMITMENT BY NORTHERN MEMBERS TO RETURN TO THE CA ON MONDAY, APRIL 24; HOWEVER, THE FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT OVER THE SHARIA PROVISIONS OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION REMAINS. REPORTEDLY, FEELINGS IN THE NORTH ARE STILL RUNNING QUITE HIGH.

-- WITH THE REPORTED DEPARTURE OF STUDENTS FROM THE CAMPUSES OF LAGOS AND AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITIES, THE STUDENT CRISIS MAY HAVE EASED. AT THE SAME TIME THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION HAS REFUSED TO BACK DOWN FROM ITS DECISION TO RAISE UNIVERSITY FEES 300 PERCENT WHICH SPARKED THE CURRENT CRISIS. STUDENT LEADERS HAVE ANNOUNCED A MEETING IN LAGOS APRIL 22 TO CONSIDER THEIR NEXT STEP.

-- THE POLICE APPARENTLY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN CONFINING STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS TO CAMPUSES AROUND THE COUNTRY. THE VIOLENCE WHICH ERUPTED, HOWEVER, RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF SEVERAL STUDENTS AND BYSTANDERS. THIS SITUATION HAS GENERATED SOME SYMPATHY FOR THE STUDENTS AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

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4. WE HAVE REPORTED ONE UNSUCCESSFUL COUP PLOT IN THE MILITARY EARLIER THIS YEAR. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN UNCONFIRMED RUMORS OF ANOTHER PLOT NIPPED IN THE BUD. SET AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE DISSATISFACTION OF SOME WITHIN THE MILITARY WITH THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE WITH THEIR CONSEQUENT LOSS OF POWER, PRESTIGE AND MONEY, IT IS LOGICAL TO ASSUME THAT EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAVE ENCOURAGED OFFICERS OUTSIDE THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL, AND PERHAPS SOME WITHIN, TO CONSIDER STEPPING IN TO 'SAVE THE NATION' IN ITS HOUR OF CRISIS. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION TO SUPPORT THIS SPECULATION BUT SHOULD NOTE THAT WHILE ALL OF THE PROBLEMS OUTLINED ARE NOT THE FAULT OF THE CURRENT REGIME, IT CERTAINLY BEARS THE BRUNT OF CRITICISM. LGT. IN THE LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE, WE ARE NOW WITNESSING THE IMPACT OF REINING IN AN OVERHEATED ECONOMY AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF GRADUALLY RETURNING TO CIVILIAN RULE. VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY ARE TESTING THE ABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

TO CONTROL THE SITUATION WHILE ATTEMPTING TO CARVE OUT FOR
THEMSELVES A GREATER ROLE UNDER THE FUTURE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT.

6. WE THINK THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT SITUATION
IS THAT THE FMG WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN BASIC CONTROL OF THE
SITUATION. WHILE THE POSSIBILITY OF A COUP OR POSTPONEMENT OF
THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE ARE MORE ON PEOPLES MINDS NOW
THAN BEFORE, WE DEFINITELY CONSIDER THESE LESS LIKELY
OUTCOMES.

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